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ABSTRACT

Although the problems facing dual-profession couples are almost universally acknowledged, studies on dual-profession couples have only recently emerged from those on dual-worker or dual-career families. To explore the perceptions that women in dual-profession marriages have of their roles, conflicts, and coping strategies, focus group interviews and case studies of nine women in dual-profession marriages were content analyzed. The findings indicated that for these professional women the identity of professional was very important to their self-esteem. Most had entered their profession by chance, and only two identified a future professional dream. Although the women expressed a need for recognition and praise for their achievement, few had had professional mentors or felt they received sufficient praise or recognition from their husbands or colleagues. The order of saliency for their three major roles was mother, wife, and professional; unstated role expectations by others defined their boundaries of behavior, restricted their opportunities for career advancement, and often caused them guilt and resentment. Conflicts related to the dual-profession marriages were evident in attempts to balance career and achievement needs, equity and responsibility, money, and time and stress. Their most commonly employed coping strategies were accommodation/sacrifice, avoidance/withdrawal, hiring help, planning/scheduling, and role redefinition. (Six recommendations for future research on dual-profession marriages conclude the paper.) (MCF)

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RUNNING AT DOUBLE PACE:
WOMEN IN DUAL-PROFESSION MARRIAGES

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Abstract

This study explored the perceptions that nine women in dual-profession marriages have of their roles/conflicts/coping strategies. Content analysis of a focus group interview and case studies determined findings.

Introduction

Statistics provide increasing testimony to the increased numbers of women in graduate and professional schools. In particular, statistical information concerning women in graduate school in 1977 and in 1970 is vastly revealing in its differences:

- Three times as many women were in graduate school as were in 1970.
- The health professions--medicine and other specialties-showed a three-fold increase in enrollment.
- Business and management courses graduated five times as many women.

The percentage of women earning doctoral degrees more than doubled in a 12-year period, increasing from 10.8 percent in 1965 to 24.8 percent in 1977 (National Research Council, 1978, p. 10). An additional 18.7 percent earned first professional degrees (Brown, 1978, p. 1). While growth in the decade spanning from 1966-67 to 1976-77 was at a record high showing a 1,100 percent and a 300 percent change for first professional an doctor's degrees respectively for women, the National Center for Education Statistics projects a continued but more moderate percent of change from 1976-77 to 1986-87. Their studies indicate an 83 percent increase in women holding first professional degrees and a 75 percent change for those earning doctorate degrees (Standard Education Almanac 1981-1982, 1981, pp. 8-9).

According to a Carnegie Commission report (1973), professionally educated women tend to marry men with comparable levels of education. In fact, 63 percent of doctoral women marry men with doctorate or professional degrees (Centra, 1974, p. 112) and 80 percent of women physicians marry physicians or other professional men (Berman et al, 1975). Thus, as the number of professionally educated and employed women increases, the incidence of dual professional families may also be expected to increase steadily. Parker, Peltier and Wolleat

(1981) note a consistent seven percent increase per year in the growth of this family lifestyle over the past ten years. In fact, in 1979, there were over three million dual-profession marriages in the United States (Rice, 1979, p. 6), making this life-style the most rapidly growing occupational category in American society.

Just what is it that makes a dual profession career couple different from another working couple or from a dual-career couple? The answer to the question must lie first in the salient area of definition and then in the professional nature of the wife's work. Yet, while there has been massive study on the latter two categories of working couples, very little has been written about dual-profession couples and specifically about the roles of the women in these partnerships, their conflicts, and their coping strategies.

Studies on dual profession couples have only recently emerged from those on dual-worker and dual-career families. Confusion over terminology has been responsible for much of the intertwining of studies and for the resulting assumption that the term "dual-career marriage" equates "dual-profession" marriage. Consequently, it is necessary to look at some of the early literature on both dual-worker and dual-career families.

A Brief Review of the Literature

The term "dual-career" family was made popular in the Rapoports' ground-breaking work in 1969. This British study aimed to provide a comprehensive description "of how educational, economic, and social-psychological factors combined to motivate and constrain women from participating in the occupational world in ways commensurate with their abilities" (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1969, p. 4). When the researchers probed for the strains existent in this distinctive new marital role focusing on women who were combining full-time careers and marriage, they uncovered dilemmas concerning role overload environmental/social sanctions, personal identity and self-esteem social-network functions, and integration of occupational/domestic roles.

Studies conducted within the last five years have attempted to define the term "professional" as characterizing people possessing the highest terminal degree in their fields, particularly in law, medicine, and higher education. The findings remain mixed, showing alternatively the psychic costs and advantages for women living with a multiple role lifestyle. Causing special difficulties are the lack of established normative role behaviors and the segregation of family tasks by sex--especially in childraising.

That problems occur for dual-profession couples because of the many roles each partner assumes in a high stress lifestyle is almost universally acknowledged (Bebbington, 1973; Berman, Sacks and Lief, 1975; Burke and Weir, 1976; Johnson and Johnson, 1977; and St. John-Parsons, 1978). The wife in particular carries the responsibility for the three highly visible roles of wife, mother, and professional. Problems are inevitable because no social order provides for the realization of all roles and their attitudinal values simultaneously (Gross, 1958; Hunt and Hunt, 1977). Furthermore, each of the three major roles requires emotional commitment, unlimit. time, and prodigious energy; and all contain "the concept of irreplaceability and individuality" (Schumacher, 1974, p. 23). The basic problem is how to combine individual fulfillment and freedom with responsibility to one's mate (Hall and Hall in Olds, 1980, p. 1). The wife's assumption of a professional role does not mean a significant change in family roles because, according to Poloma and Garland, women do not perceive their husbands as "sharing" in household and family roles but merely as "helping" (1972, p. 257).

Furthermore, as a professional, a woman is caught "between the sort of success that demands single-minded devotion to a goal as a wife/mother, the sort of balanced life that includes family and work, but precludes overachieving" (Goodman in Riecher, 1978, p. 7). Because these women are high achievers and highly motivated, they often feel they should be able to overcome any hurdles and, consequently, assume a superwoman stance (Holmstrom, 1972). If, however, the women are unable to handle the multiple roles at a level satisfying to their expectations, they feel the stress of inadequacy (Riecher, 1978). The resultant bind for women carrying multiple roles is "a split in identity." They are characterized as "constantly beset with divided loyalties, a sense of guilt and often a shaky sense of identity" (Symonds, 1979, p. 57). Bean and Wolfman (1979) and Hoffman and Nye (1974) concur that internal stress is caused by a woman's high expectations of her self and her propelling drive, concurrent with guilt derived from not living up to her potential because of accommodation to other roles.

Current research shows professional women unwilling to sacrifice a predominant role, preferring instead to employ adaptive methods to manage role conflicts. To this end, the three most common coping strategies reported by over 80 percent of the women in Gray's study (1979) include 1) rotating attention among roles; 2) reducing standards within roles; and 3) encouraging family members to help with household chores. Generally, the study concluded that the less distressed professional women let their roles overlap somewhat in an effort to achieve balance without establishing priorities.

Professional women possess not only outwardly visible strategies for coping, but they also employ psychological and perhaps unconscious ones. Shaevitz and Shaevitz point out the common use of the following methods: 1) denial or the refusal to admit the reality of a situation, a technique characteristic of the partner who is most overloaded with role responsibilities; 2) depression or self-blame whereupon one turns anger inward; 3) rigidity or the unwillingness to consider possible solutions; 4) psychosomatic reactions or illnesses; 5) withdrawal or distancing from normal interaction with other people; and 6) going crazy or a temporary inability to function and to recognize what is happening (1980, p. 18).

While it is apparent from the literature that there is no single coping strategy that is outstandingly effective, the best predictor of a woman's successful participation in professional work seems to be her self-image which is enhanced by her husband's support, visibly communicated by his commitment, trust and approval of her dedication to that work (Bailyn, 1964; Epstein, 1983; Gordon and Hall, 1974; Holohan and Gilbert, 1979; Kundsin, 1974; Nadelson and Eisenberg, 1977; Peruci and Targ, 1978; Rapoport and Rapoport, 1969; Theodore, 1971; Weingarten, 1978).

Description of the Current Study

Method

In 1983 this researcher explored the perceptions that nine women in dual-profession marriages in a certain southern city have of their roles, conflicts, and coping strategies. Two approaches, a focus group interview and the case study, both based in the constant comparative analysis procedure of grounded research theory, were used to gather information. The focus group interview shares salient characteristics with the case history, or elite interview: Both are conducted in part for information that is not written down--information that only members of an elite or given culture or subculture seem to know--and both possess distinctive perspectives (Feldman, 1981, p. 33). Additionally, neither a focus group nor an elite interview requires or demands a sampling. Indeed, eight to twelve participants is considered ideal for a focus group. The researcher identified nine women from 24 possible participants who each filled the three roles critical to the study: Full-time professional, wife, and mother. Acting as a moderator-interviewer, the researcher guided the sessions with protocols developed around the four persistent areas of concern to the study:

. What did it mean to these nine women to be professionals? How important to them is achievement in the professions?

- What were the perceptions these women had of the roles they assume in a marriage to another professional person? Specifically, what are the roles? What are the internal and external expectations attached to these roles?
- What conflicts did these professionals experience because of their lifestyles, which combine both marriage and a professional career? Was conflict related to traditional or emerging roles? Was equity perceived as important in contributing to marital conflict?
- What coping strategies were they employing to meet the pressures of this kind of marriage and to manage or resolve conflicts? Were there any factors in their childhood backgrounds which helped prepare them for coping with multiple roles?

All discussion was tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for content to determine the nature of the issues discussed; the persistence of these issues; and the intensity of direction.

Participants

The nine professional women participating in the study included the following:

- Alder, M.D., a 48-year old physician born outside the United States. Married to a physician, she has been in practice 22 years and has three children.
- Boston, J.D., a 32-year old attorney married to a physician for nine years and in practice seven years. They have one child.
- Huffner, Ed.D., a 42-year old professor who has been married to her professor-husband for 20 years. In her profession for 14 years, she has two children.
- Jordan, J.D. and L.L.M., a 31-year old attorney, married to an attorney for five years and mother of one child. She has been practicing eight years.
- Kurth, Ed.D., a 34-year old professor married to a professor for 12 years and mother of three children. She has been teaching for 11 years.
- Maynard, M.D., a 29-year old physician married seven years to a physician and mother of one child. She has been in practice six years.
- Pomeroy, Ph.D., a 33-year old scholar working in a bureaucracy, married seven years to a physician and mother of one child.
- Secor, M.D., a 43-year old physician in practice for 18 years, married to an attorney for 20 years, and the mother of two children.
- Thacker, Ph.D., a 43-year old professor for 22 years, married to a professor for 21 years, and mother of three children.

Findings

The nine professional women who participated in both phases of this descriptive study are, obviously, distinct individuals. Nevertheless, because they identify themselves by the same three major roles, they frequently shared a common perspective upon which inferential findings can be based. From the study the researcher found that:

1. To be a professional was very important to the self-esteem and identity of each woman.
2. Only one woman identified in her high school years a career goal or dream--and that decision was based on a friend's career choice. The remaining eight entered the professions by happenstance.
3. Achievement was most meaningful to these women at the intrinsic level and explained their drive to stay competent and current in their professional field.
4. The participants voiced a need for recognition of and praise for their performance and achievement, particularly from their colleagues.
5. These women stated that their professional spouses had a definite effect on their careers in terms of opportunities, advancement, and mobility.
6. Only two women identified a future professional dream, but one stated emphatically that she would not pursue it.
7. Only three of these professional women had had mentors in their academic careers, and none had one at the time of the study.
8. Role models--particularly mothers and close relatives--were important in developing confidence and security and expanding their outlook.
9. These professional women possessed three major roles with the order of saliency being that of mother, wife, and professional.
10. Unstated role expectations for self often caused these women guilt.
11. Unstated role expectations by others defined their boundaries of behavior, restricted their opportunities for career advancement, and often caused them guilt and resentment.
12. The most frequently cited instances for helping these women prepare for assuming multiple roles were birth order, family need, role models, and personal characteristics such as intelligence, confidence, and self-esteem.
13. Personal conflicts for the nine women were most intensive in the areas of career advancement, self-identity, and "stroking" needs. The younger women in the group stated that they received "stroking" from their husbands; the older women stated that their needs were not being met sufficiently by their husbands and only rarely by their colleagues.

14. Conflicts related to their dual-profession marriages were most evidently related to the balance between career and achievement needs, equity and responsibility, money, and time and stress. The younger women, whose earnings closely paralleled those of their husbands, did not express conflicts concerning money. The older women, whose earnings exceeded those of their husbands, were bothered by that disparity and experienced conflict in that area.

15. Personal cost issues arose from the conflicts the women expressed and appeared as lack of achievement, exhaustion, and guilt. All of the older women, plus one of the younger women, had rearranged the priorities in their lives because of the stress of exhaustion.

16. These professional women said they felt lonely and isolated, lacking both friends and an external support system.

17. To cope with their multiple roles and conflicts, these women employed most commonly the strategies of accommodation/sacrifice, avoidance/withdrawal, hiring help, planning/scheduling, and role redefinition.

Discussion

What distinguishes a dual-profession couple from other working couples is, in essence, the additional and specialized commitment of the wife to her profession.

Professionals are expected to pursue their work in a certain and very rigid way, which often means the work becomes an all-consuming activity. Because of the excessively demanding nature of their work, professionals have usually expected other family members to subordinate their activities. Thus, having two professionals in the same family constitutes a structural problem. Traditionally, American society has found the man's profession more important. Poloma and Garland (1971) and Standley and Soule (1974) found this true for female lawyers, doctors, and academics in dual-profession marriages.

Society perceives a professional as one who has persistence and drive, dedication, and emotional detachment. The need for extensive research, thinking, and writing helps define the parameters that give credence to the saying that the professions make jealous mistresses. With an unusual quality of single-mindedness, a professional steeps herself in esoteric knowledge, submits to an intense socialization process, and concentrates on achieving success. In the end, the process has usually enhanced an already strong sense of ego.

Once at home, however, the female professional assumes the role of wife, a role which has traditionally been an accommodating

one in deference to society's stress on the importance of the husband's profession. Culture has relegated a woman to the role of man's mate and helper. Often, the wife has assumed the mantle of the husband's profession and has been comforted by a ready-made identity. Running a household has been the wife's preoccupation, a job which definitely does not allow concentration on anything: it is a job of interruptions and routines in disarray. Thus, in a dual-profession family, the wife must perform the customary role of a subordinate, even though she continues to carry also the role of professional, a role not noted for deference.

Completing the group of major roles is that of mother--another role fraught with interruptions and disorder. Society has expected a woman in this role to be accommodating and mindful of placing the needs of the children first. As a result, she has a "mandate to know and see all about [her] children" (Epstein, Woman's, p. 108). After all, society maintains, it is the natural role of the mother to rear her children and carry the burden of responsibility.

Society creates definite expectations, responsibilities, and demands for these three primary roles; but roles are further defined by one's own standards and goals, by both stated and unstated expectations. Assuming multiple roles inherently requires controlling these aspects of role expectations.

A woman's pattern of adult development plays a crucial part in determinig how she handles her multiple role responsibilities and how she defines herself through them. At this point, an understanding of a woman's development and its implications for this study is most effectively reached by placing the pattern in juxtaposition to that of a man, as developed in seminal studies by Daniel Levinson.

Levinson in The Seasons of a Man's Life emphasizes the importance of goal-directed planning for a young male and notes that, accordingly, the progression of his adult development is linear in nature, while his identity is achieved through a process of separation. Central to Levinson's discussion is the importance of "the dream" in helping a male become his own man, a dream whereby a man defines himself through his work, one of the two crucial tasks of life: work and love. In the decade of his twenties, a man consciously identifies a dream and begins the arduous path toward achieving it; modifying it and adjusting it as he reaches his mid-thirties; and perhaps abandoning it altogether if he does not see the possibility of attaining it by his mid-forties. Once he has begun to control his dream and discover his self in relationship to it, he then directs his attention to the other salient area of life, that of love.

A woman, on the other hand, according to Maggie Scarf in Unfinished Business: Pressure Points in the lives of Women, defines herself primarily through relationships rather than through work. To this end, she does not identify a dream of her own and set out to pursue it; rather, she searches for relationships to provide her with an identity and to reinforce her self-esteem. In doing so, her identity is held in abeyance. And when she establishes a meaningful relationship with a man, she tends to adopt or share his dream, thus fusing her relationship and identity in the process.

Unlike a man's development which is defined through issues of separation, a woman's progresses in a cyclical fashion, always returning to that point of relationships and self-definition through the approval of others.

For a professional woman, such as characterized in this study, the concerns of goal-setting, achievement, "stroking," and self-esteem are closely intertwined perhaps because of what Scarf terms her strong need to realize self-esteem from intimate relationships. If she does not fully achieve her identity until she is secure in a relationship, then, her goal-setting ability is blocked. Without direction in her life, the woman finds it difficult to define the purpose of her achievement needs. Because achievement is meaningful for a woman not only on an intrinsic level but also on an extrinsic or public one, it is this later aspect of definition that becomes confused and often equated with praise, rewards, and "stroking." Her need for approval from others may guide her behavior, according to Scarf, as she seeks to avoid the fear of rejection or the loss of love (1980).

The resulting dilemma is that while a woman may achieve to meet her own personal goals and aspirations, she may not receive public recognition of this fact--a situation which sorely tests her esteem needs and propels her to achieve at increasingly higher levels in continuing efforts to attain others' acceptance. Because her competency is often accepted and, indeed, taken for granted, little emotional nurturance or recognition is extended to the professional woman either by her husband or by her colleagues who, as Nadelson points out, fail to recognize its importance "because it may seem absurd that a woman so competent and attractive should need to be told the obvious" (1977, p. 1072). The result, however, is a diminished self-esteem.

To satisfy her emotional need, a female professional may intensify her efforts, working harder and harder to reach levels of achievement she has yet to define. Since she has been trained from childhood to please someone else, usually a male figure, now as she asks herself, "What do I want? How can I get what I want?"

she may develop, according to psychologist Erik Erikson, a sense of shame and doubt over this new focus on herself and her needs for autonomy, control, and emotional sustenance.

Concomitant with the developing self-doubts, the female professional may begin to use the two disparate strategies, commonly identified in medical and sociological journals but obscure to the general reading public, those of adopting a stance of avoidance and withdrawal or of assuming a sense of total responsibility by becoming a "superwoman." Despite her intense and advanced educational training, the woman may avoid the conflicts and discomforts emanating from her cognitive dissonance by simply abandoning or by adjusting her professional career. Instead, she selects a less demanding occupation or sometimes enters the semi-profession (the allied health field, social work, elementary/high school teaching, and others) so that she can fit her work more closely to the needs of her children and husband. The Rapoport's study in 1969 first noted the willingness of a married professional woman to place her career second to that of her husband and to settle for lowered aspirations. This strategy of avoidance or "fear of success" in Matina Horner's terms, relieves a married professional woman not only from role conflict; it also causes her to cease an active search for success and, thus, reduces anxiety over the threat of social rejection and loss of femininity.

Alternatively, the female professional may feel that the best way to handle self-doubt and role conflict is to become perfect in every role, to become a superwoman. An examination of the superwoman complex reveals that a woman doctorate spends less time on job and professional activities because she spends more of her time on household tasks and on child care. With or without children, a married woman spends an average of forty-nine hours per week on employment and professional activities, whereas a married man without children averages fifty-three hours per week and a married man with children averages fifty-two. A male professional clears three to four hours more of professional time than does a female professional. Even more revealing is Astin's study showing that a married doctorate woman with children spends between eighteen to nineteen hours a week managing the household with an additional ten hours devoted to child care (Centra, Women, pp. 43-45).

Marcille Williams defines this superwoman as "a special type of woman with seemingly limitless energy and a penchant for attempting the nearly impossible" (1977, p. 182). Psychiatrist Alexandra Symonds calls her a woman "with extraordinary vigor" but then questions whether it is rather "a deeper and more significant struggle" occurring. The married woman professional, dividing time and energy between home and work, is constantly plagued with "divided

loyalties, a sense of guilt, and often a shaky sense of identity" ("Wife," p. 57).

Constantly attending to the needs of others and constantly shifting roles--all the while maintaining a face of self-sufficiency, the professional woman seems to pay little or no attention to her own needs or personal growth. According to Symonds, she lacks a "sense of entitlement" and, consequently, often loses touch with herself. Lopate explains the situation graphically when she says such a woman "submerges [herself] in a tunnel of obligations for ten or twenty years . . . ." ("Marriage," p. 503). Not unexpectedly, Symonds finds a woman who combines professional work with marriage and family "pays an excessively high price" ("Wife," p. 62).

Studies of adult development combine to provide a partial explanation for the findings revealed in this exploratory dissertation. Thus, it is not surprising to find that both a survey of this literature and this study, while also extolling the sense of shared communication within the marriage and the benefits of a supportive husband, disclose a deep concern about the emotional and psychic cost to a woman in a dual-profession marriage--a woman who runs at double pace to juggle multiple roles and responsibilities.

An Impressionistic Conclusion

The intensity of the nine women's voices encouraged the researcher to form the following impressionistic definition of these women in dual-profession marriages:

Contrary to what one might expect from a review of the literature, this woman was not born into a professional family. A sense of professional identity was not imprinted from childhood; instead, she usually just "happened" into her profession. From the beginning of her career, this lack of direction is apparent as she accommodates her career to the primacy of his, as she eschews a more demanding specialty for one that will enable her to be home more often with her family. She says she accommodates willingly, yet in her later years she speaks of that situation with sadness and often bitterness and resentment. Ultimately, she nurtures everyone's needs but her own. She does not usually possess a dream for the future; or if she does, she claims she will not pursue it. And, although she admits to thinking of quitting her work, she is not sure just what else she would rather do.

This professional woman is caught in the bind of conflicting expectations: Society expects her, as a professional, to be superior in achievement and she also expects that of herself. Yet, when she performs at highest levels, she receives little or no recognition

of that fact. Consequently, she works harder to attain the rewards of praise and recognition from her peers and, when the rewards are not forthcoming, feels dissatisfied and guilty. If she uses avoidance or withdrawal as coping mechanisms, this professional woman has an excuse not to achieve.

Although she describes herself as a "high-energy" person, this woman handling multiple role responsibilities is exhausted. There is no energy left to expend on friendships, to develop a support system, or even to communicate well with her husband; and yet, these are the very sources that could offer her the "stroking" she desires and needs. She often feels lonely and isolated in her personal life.

Confident and secure in her profession, she expresses worries about the lack of equity--the lack of shared responsibility--in her marital relationship and admits privately to being anxious about the stability of her marriage. The strain of balancing two demanding professions within the marriage is telling: This strain prevents her from socializing and maintaining friendships, even from sharing in communication on desired levels with her husband.

While this woman states that her husband's profession receives priority and while she accords him this control, she herself manages the money in the family, sometimes earning significantly more than her husband.

In conclusion, this professional woman is intense yet reflective, capable of describing herself with humor and also with poignancy. She creates a vivid picture of contradiction and paradox, this woman who runs at double pace.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is a dearth of information about dual-profession marriages, particularly about the role of each spouse, the conflicts, and the coping strategies. It is, therefore, recommended that future research explore questions such as the following:

1. What perceptions do men in dual-profession marriages hold of their roles, conflicts, and coping strategies? Such research might be related to present studies of women professionals and present a comparative analysis with emphasis on the causal differences between male and female development.

2. What is the relationship of competency, achievement, and "stroking" factors? If women had their "stroking" needs met in their formative years, would the need for achievement

and recognition remain at the same high level? Since women depend heavily on others for approval, it is recommended that such a study examine the relationship between performance and external rewards and recognition.

3. How can women who have peaked in their professions while only in the mid-thirties to mid-forties age range be guided and counseled so that they may continue to be professionally productive and successful? The researcher might use multiple focus group interview sessions to determine the reasons women give for dissatisfaction with achievement in their professions and to discover ways of enriching their work experience.

4. In what ways can young females be taught or socialized to realize the importance of goal-setting as a constant process throughout their lives? Such a study might be expository in nature, pointing out methods to stress the importance of setting both short and long term goals so that one can not only attain a "dream" but also avoid the drift and feeling of purposelessness that occurred for these women in mid-life.

5. What are the characteristics of long-term dual-profession marriages? It is recommended that since the incidence of these marriages is increasing and since at present longitudinal studies are non-existent, researchers identify couples willing to participate as case studies in a long term project to examine the factors present in successful dual-profession marriages.

6. How can dual-profession couples better meet their expectations concerning the concept of "sharing" versus "helping"? It is recommended that counselors initiate and offer courses of study to professionals prior to marriage. Such courses might stress the differences inherent in the two concepts and the resultant bearing on role conflict.

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